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THE  
Religious GOVERNMENT  
OF A  
F A M I L Y;  
PARTICULARLY  
The Obligation and Importance of  
F A M I L Y Worship.  
IN  
THREE DISCOURSES.

Preached at CARTER-LANE.

By EDWARD PICKARD.

*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,*  
Joshua xxiv. 15.

L O N D O N :

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## P R E F A C E.

**T**H E S E discourses were delivered from the pulpit some time since, without any thought of their being made more public. But having lately preached the first of them at *St. Thomas's in Southwark*, and being desired to publish it, I determined that the other two should accompany it.

As they were first preached to the congregation amongst whom I stately labour, to their acceptance and service I now particularly dedicate them, as a testimony of my duty, affection, and gratitude, to them.

## P R E F A C E.

My sincere intention is, to advance christian piety and virtue: more especially, to recommend the daily worship of God in families. A duty which appears to me, to be of great importance and utility: but which, I fear, is not so much regarded as it deserves.

THESE are my reasons, and let this be my apology, for this publication. If these discourses contribute any thing to revive serious practical religion, my end will be answered: I shall be very thankful: and desire to give God the glory.

E. P.



## DISCOURSE I.

GENESIS xviii. 19.

*For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*



THESE words are spoke concerning Abraham. Whose character as recorded in scripture, appears to be amiable, great, and exemplary: and, as such, to have recommended him to particular marks of the divine regard. The view in which our text places this worthy patriarch is, as the head of a family. And it represents his wife, rational, and religious conduct in this character: and the favour which the Almighty showed to him upon this account. He was a kind master;



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a tender parent : and he was also wise and pious. And these affections and principles co-operating, engaged him to exert his authority and care, to promote religion and virtue in his family.

NOR was his prudent, pious care ineffectual or unrewarded. For he had a wife and faithful servant to manage his affairs : a pious, dutiful son to comfort and rejoice his old age : and the blessing of God upon himself, and his house. And indeed a family so conducted, promises the greatest pleasure and happiness. Piety and virtue properly recommended by the head of a house, is likely to diffuse order and peace through the whole : to engage every member to contribute his share to every one's comfort and felicity : and to secure that most important good of all, the blessing of Almighty God. And if we carry our views beyond this life, such a method bids fair to promote the everlasting happiness of those, who are committed to our trust.



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I propose therefore to show you,

I. Wherein the religious government of a family consists. And,

II. To offer some arguments and motives to engage us to it.

I. Let me point out to you, wherein the religious government of a family consists.

You will give me leave to use plainness and freedom: as it is a matter of great importance: and yet, I fear, not so much attended to, as it ought to be.

EVERY family may be considered, as a little community within itself: intrusted to the government of those who are the heads of it. It is incumbent upon them to maintain regularity therein: to manage its affairs, in their respective provinces, with discretion and œconomy: to treat every part with care and tenderness: and at the same time, by a proper authority, to preserve a due subordination, and the necessary connection which one member has with another. This is highly

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fit, even in a civil and prudential view : in order to avoid confusion and distraction : and to render a family agreeable and comfortable.

BUT I am to consider and treat the subject in a religious view. And to represent the duty, which is in this respect incumbent upon every head and parent of a family. Such a one should remember the duty, which he owes to God in his station : and the importance of the divine blessing. He should also consider the real character, the most important interest of every one committed to his care : as equally with himself a servant of God ; a disciple of Jesus ; capable of religion and virtue ; upon a state of trial ; and designed for immortality. And he should moreover consider himself, as vested with a momentous trust ; as having immortal beings committed to his tuition : and as, in some measure, answerable for them to the great Lord and Judge of all. However little this may be attended to, yet it is a very just and serious view. And the inquiry now before us is, wherein consists this duty ? How may

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this solemn trust be faithfully discharged? In answer to this I observe,

*First*, Great care is to be taken who are admitted as parts and members of the family.

THIS, if not a part of religious order and government, yet is of great importance to it: and deserves more attention, than, perhaps, is generally paid to it. I will now suppose the heads of a family united in a persuasion of the importance of religion: desirous to maintain it in their house; and that their children should keep the way of the Lord. And, I say, it behoves them to be careful, who they admit as members of their family.

It will be easily seen, that what I mean, is the choice of servants. To be too particular here, would be impertinent. And yet as the thing is of no small consequence in a religious view, you will allow a general hint. For children and young persons will be very apt to catch the language and manners of those



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those that are about them. It were *desireable* therefore, that these should have a real sense of God and religion. But this may not be easily obtained, or known. Thus much however, every religious head of a family may and will require of servants, that they be conformable to orders: that they observe external decency: that they regard truth and sobriety: and that they avoid all profaneness and obscenity in their words and actions. About these things, the wise and religious head of a family will be at least as careful (and I think ought to be more so) as about his children contracting any thing aukward and mean; or being alarmed, and frightened by idle tales. For habits may be hereby insensibly acquired. Or at least those things made familiar to young persons, which they ought either to be ignorant of, or to consider with detestation.

*Secondly*, Every religious head of a family will endeavour, by the exercise of a mild and proper authority, to restrain those that are under his care, from such things as are likely to corrupt their minds; to weaken  
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the force of religious principles ; and to prevent or efface the impressions which religious instruction might make upon them.

It is true there is no authority over conscience. Nor can it avail to make any truly pious and good. But it can restrain and regulate the outward conduct. And here every wise and good man will exert it, under the management of prudence and love. Whatever may be said to palliate the neglect of this proper discipline with respect to others, yet as to our children there can be no colour for neglecting it. These are, by nature and religion, placed under the inspection, authority, and care of the parents. Their inexperience, weakness of judgment, strength of inclination and passion, need and plead for a reason and wisdom superior to their own, to guide and controul them. Here kind authority should exert itself, to curb headstrong passions ; to check violent inclinations ; to restrain from dangerous pleasures ; and to prevent the too eager pursuit of those that are in a degree allowable : least they should be led aside into the ways  
of

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of vice and folly; the principles of piety and virtue be impaired or lost; and habits be acquired, which we and they shall have hereafter cause to repent of. And perhaps there never was more need of attending to this direction, than at present: when pleasures and entertainments of all sorts are so much in vogue: and to introduce young persons to them, is almost become a part of modern education. The prevalence of these is universally lamented: and their bad effects sensibly felt. And how can the growing evil be stopped, unless parents and heads of families will exert themselves? Deny their own gratification? and exercise the authority which nature has given them, and reason, religion, and affection call for?

AND yet here, I own, great prudence is necessary: and while we take care of too indulgently relaxing, we should avoid too rigorous and severe restraints. Some amusements, some diversions, youth must have. Nature requires them. Religion allows them. A too forcible or a total restraint, may render the desire more violent, when  
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it has an opportunity to break loose : and give unhappy prejudices against religion, as morose and melancholly. Here then all our prudence is requisite. And our conduct must be a great deal regulated, by the disposition and temper of our children. In general, we should endeavour to convince them, that our restraints are not because we grudge them pleasure : but from the danger we apprehend to their best interests. We should point out to them those dangers : and perhaps may be able to set before them, some striking instances of it. It would be of use to find out the prevailing inclination and passion : and not to let overmuch sternness tempt them to conceal their true selves from us. The mild authority is to be preferred before the severe : the persuasive, rather than the compulsive restraint. Our company should be made agreeable to them. And some proper amusements be allowed and encouraged : that they may not be forced to seek them abroad, or without our knowledge and concurrence. And if we would accustom them to acts of benevolence and charity, at their own motion, or as our almoners, this would not only



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only strengthen the good affections in them, but give them that divine pleasure in the performance, and upon review, as would make them less fond of the unsubstantial delights of sensual amusements. Other things also there are, which while they please and entertain, would also improve their minds: and yield higher delight, as well as more advantage, than the gayest entertainments which an extravagant age can furnish. But I am insensibly got beyond my subject. Let the importance of the thing be my apology. I now proceed

*Thirdly,* Another part of this duty is religious instruction.

THAT this is a great and considerable part of the duty of every head and parent of a family, is too obvious to need any proof. I shall only give you a few short and general hints concerning it.

THE matter of our instructions should be plain and important truths: not things abstruse and controversial. The first principles  
of



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of religion are obvious and striking ; and their evidence and their importance soon and easily felt. That there is a God that made and supports them ; and that therefore they ought to pray to, reverence, love, and serve him. That they have immortal souls, which must be saved or perish for ever. That there are duties which they owe to God, to their fellow creatures and to themselves. The value and importance of the gospel salvation, in our present state of depravity, guilt, and weakness, and with respect to a future state of existence. These and such like are things, which can hardly be too oft, or too seriously inculcated : and in which we should take care that they be well principled and grounded. This we should endeavour to do in the most plain and familiar manner : and adapt our instructions to their feeble capacities. To teach them high and abstruse points, is feeding them with the meat for strong men, instead of the milk for babes. To begin with teaching them disputable notions, and party sentiments, is fixing prejudices in their minds ; forming them for bigotry ; and leading them to misplace religion.

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gion. To teach them words without ideas, is only enabling them to talk without improving their understandings, or forming their minds. Religious instruction should never be made a task or a burthen: but as easy, familiar, and agreeable as may be. And though I do not condemn proper forms and catechisms, yet I think that a free and condescending conversation upon the great subjects of religion is most likely to convey useful knowledge, and fix religious impressions. And it would be well if, where the parent is capable of it, those forms or catechisms were considered, as furnishing topics for this familiar conversation with them, rather than as what the child should be set to learn as a task; or the instructor confine himself to. The word of God is the pure fountain of religious knowledge. In this therefore children ought to be well instructed. And single passages, or whole paragraphs taken from thence, would furnish out hints for conveying the most useful knowledge in the most easy, convincing, and impressive manner. Nor would this method, if it were tried, be found so difficult as it may seem to be.

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The very questions our young pupils would ask us, would lead us on. And while we were improving them, we might perhaps be no losers ourselves. Authority should be used very tenderly in matters of religious instruction. Our great endeavour should be, to open their understandings; to enlighten their judgments; and to engage their hearts.

I go on to another and very important part of the religious government of a family. And that is

*Fourthly,* That the worship of God be regularly and stately kept up in it.

THE reasonableness and importance of this, will, I hope, appear from the following considerations.

EVERY family is a little society: of which each one is a member: incorporated, as it were, into one another: governed by the same rules: having one joint interest to pursue: the same wants in common to be supplied: and mutually depending upon the pro-  
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vidence and blessing of the Almighty. Is it not then highly proper, is it not a plain dictate of nature, and what a sense of duty and the feelings of relative affections recommend, that they should unite in one common acknowledgement of the great God, the parent and ruler of all? That they should join together in spreading their wants before him? imploring his favour and blessing? and paying him their grateful offerings for those mercies, and comforts, which they in common enjoy? And when so proper to do this, as when upon the return of the morning, our blessings and enjoyments open to us afresh; and we are about to engage in the affairs of active life, through which we constantly need and depend upon his guidance and blessing? And also, when upon the close of the day, we have its blessings to recollect; its infirmities and sins to acknowledge, and seek the pardon of; and are about to lay ourselves down to rest, leaving our habitations, substance, and persons, wholly to the divine protection and care?



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FAMILIES also may be considered as nurseries for the world, for the church, and for heaven. As religion is in every view of the last importance, here it should begin : here it should be maintained, inculcated, and promoted. And how, I pray you, can this be so properly and effectually done, as by the regular, serious worship of God there ?

EVERY head of a family, every parent especially, is under the most sacred endearing obligations, to promote the happiness of those committed to his care. Can this be more effectually done, than by promoting their piety and virtue ? by fixing in their minds an awful sense of an all-seeing God and judge ? and engaging them to live in his fear every day long ? Think then, is there any thing that can have a more direct and apparent tendency hereto, than the stated worship of God in your house ? And doth not the neglect of it, threaten the decay and loss of serious piety ? and lead them to live as without God in the world ?

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EXAMPLE hath a great influence upon children and servants. If therefore we set them a pattern of a regular conscientious acknowledgment of God, by daily joining with them in seriously performing the duties of prayer and praise to him, will not this naturally inspire them with the same pious sentiments, which we ourselves express? Give them that governing awe and veneration for him, which we discover? and lead them herein to follow our example? And is there not great danger on the other hand, least by a stated neglect, or a very rare and careless performance of this duty, they should be led to an habitual forgetfulness of God? And if they see us live as without him, should by degrees banish him from their thoughts?

NOR are the advantages of this practice, an inconsiderable argument to recommend it. Do we not by night and by day, depend upon the divine protection and guidance? Can our designs succeed without him? Are not our domestic peace and blessings owing to his indulgent smiles?  
Are

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Are not our children his gift, and an heritage from the Lord? Cannot he secretly blast our best comforts; and while we are surrounded with them, hinder our enjoyment of them? And can we expect his regards, or that the candle of the Lord should shine upon our tabernacle, if we are too careless, or too proud, to acknowledge him there? Is it not as much our privilege as our duty, to pay our daily homage and worship to him? And is it not a source of the truest satisfaction, amidst the uncertainties and changes of life, and our ignorance of what a day or a night may bring forth, that we have not been wanting to do honour to God in our families, and to recommend our own and their concerns, to the all-wise direction and favour of our heavenly father?

NOR doth any thing contribute more to promote religion in the heart and life, or to establish an habitual fear of God in the soul, than such a daily serious converse with him in our families. Nor any thing conduce so directly to relative and dome-



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stic comfort and happiness, as well as personal, as this principle deeply settled, and preserved in its life and vigour. This is the strongest security against the force of every temptation. It is the most powerful engagement to fidelity and diligence. It directly promotes peace and harmony. And unites a family one to another in the most agreeable and lasting bond. Religion has the most favourable aspect upon domestic safety, order, and comfort. And he that by the regular worship of God in his house, endeavours to promote religion there, takes the most promising method to make himself, his children, his servants, such as one would wish a family to be, beloved of God, esteemed of men; and faithful, useful, and kind one to another.

THESE are the reasons, upon which this important part of the religious government of a family, is founded: and by which I would recommend it to you. And though sacred scripture has given no direct injunctions upon this head, yet it has given us many useful hints, and encouragements.

And

And indeed the obvious importance, reasonableness, honour and utility of it, should seem to supersede the necessity of an express command.

It is therefore to be lamented, that this duty, (for so I must call it) should be so much neglected: and especially by any, who have a regard to religion and virtue: and are desirous, that their children and household after them, should keep the way of the Lord. If they are convinced by what has been now offered, or by their own reflections, that it is a reasonable and important duty, I hope, I intreat, yea I conjure them in the name of God, that they will suffer no difficulties, which a pious discretion, and a holy resolution, can remove, to hinder their immediately engaging in it.

I MUST not omit to mention; that it will be the care of every wise and religious head of a family, that the Lord's-day be not profaned: that sacred time be properly employed: and there be no unnecessary hindrance to, or avocation from the public

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or private duties of it. And above all things he will take care, that his own temper and conduct correspond with his profession. And that he set such an example, as is fit for his children and servants to follow.

IN these things consists the duty of every wife, and religious head of a family: of every one who would acquire this honourable testimony, *For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.*

AND to engage you hereto, you will please seriously to consider the following things. The honour of God, and the interest of our Lord and Master in the world, are nearly concerned in it. The happy effects of religion to families themselves, is a great recommendation of it. It promises the best success for forming our children, to piety, usefulness, and comfort here; and for everlasting happiness hereafter. It will yield us the greatest pleasure in the performance



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formance ; the greatest satisfaction upon a review. And, finally, it will be for our honour in the great day, when we come to give an account of this important trust committed to us.

BUT let me before I close, address myself to the younger part of my hearers ; whose happiness, I have much at heart ; and whose immediate benefit, is the design of this day's service. It is very much for your sakes, my friends, that I have chose to discourse on this subject.

IF I am speaking to any, who have been in this respect sadly neglected, through the irreligion and cruelty of their parents ; or whose lot is cast in families, where scarce the profession of religion is kept up, or the worship of God is shamefully disused, I would heartily lament their unhappiness. But at the same time I would call upon them, not to take cruel revenge upon themselves, because others cruelly neglect them. This, however it may be your unhappiness, yet will not be wholly your excuse : nor save you from the sad effects of

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a sinful, impenitent course. Remember, you have immortal souls ; and an eternity before you. And though you have not all the advantages that it were to be wished you had, yet endeavour to make the most of those you have. Be thankful to Providence for the word of God : for public instructions : for the Lord's-day : and for friends raised up, to supply in some measure, those lamentable defects. And shew that you regard your own everlasting happiness, though others, to whom it ought to be dear, take so little concern about it. Oh what an honour, what a glorious thing would it be, and how unspeakably happy, to surmount all these difficulties and disadvantages ! And, through the grace of God, to attain to the character of good christians now ; and to win heaven at last ! It is not impossible. God is with you. You have your bible, and other good books. Read them carefully. You have the Lord's-day. Do not profane it. Attend the prayers and instructions of the house of God. And for your encouragement remember, that there have been instances of those, who have  
feared

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feared the Lord from their youth, whilst others about them have neglected him. Oh may each of you endeavour, to make one of that happy number !

To those who have wise and pious parents, and the advantage of being trained up in families, where religious government has been maintained, I would address myself in a few words.

GREAT is your happiness : and I sincerely congratulate you upon it. Very thankful you ought to be for it : and very careful to improve it. While others are cruelly neglected, or have no other care taken of them, than to indulge to sensual pleasure, or to rise in the world, (poor provision for an immortal soul !) you are taught such principles, and formed to such habits, as shall make the great God your friend ; lay a foundation for your usefulness and comfort here, and for your happiness when this world shall be no more.

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WHAT then is your wisdom and duty? God and man expect much from you. Upon you the interests of religion greatly depend. And great are your obligations to a life of piety, virtue, and usefulness. Be it your earnest care to answer these expectations: to fulfill these engagements: and to maintain the dignity and importance of the religious and christian character. For you to turn wicked and profligate, requires many a hard and painful struggle with principle, and conscience, and good impressions: and will be attended with aggravated guilt. Improve then the invaluable prize, which God has put into your hands. Let your parent's God be your God. Chearfully yield yourselves to his service and disposal. And resolve that whatever others do, you will serve the Lord. Thus will you best reward your parents pious care: best promote their comfort and joy: and most effectually secure your own everlasting honour and happiness.

BUT should it be otherwise: should you force your way through principle and education,

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cation, through intreaties, cautions, admonitions, encouragements, prayers, and an engaging example, consider, I beseech you, what will be the consequence! To your parents, it will be sad disappointment; bitter grief and anguish of soul; perhaps an heart bowed down and broken with distress! Or if these things do not move you, and you can see, without relenting, a careful father or a tender mother, oppressed with sorrow, and carrying the wounds you have given them to their graves, yet remember, that to yourselves the consequence will be still worse. Yes: unspeakably worse! They are free from your blood. It will all be required at your own hands. And your abused advantages inflame the last account, and accumulate your guilt and misery.

OH sad reverse of what might be your case in that solemn day! of what will be the case of all those, who improve the privileges which God has blessed them with! A delightful scene here opens! The view of which gives me the highest pleasure! When parents and children shall meet again: bless  
God

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God for each other : unite their joys with a mutual increase : and share a glory and felicity, large as they can wish for themselves, and one another, and lasting as eternity. Oh animating prospect ! Who can but feel its pleasing influence ?

UNDER the view of that solemn time, let me once more turn myself to you that are heads and parents of families, to enforce what hath been said.

GOD has committed to you a very important trust. For the discharge of it you are accountable to him. It is a trust urged upon you by the most solemn and tender engagements. Upon your fidelity to which depends in some measure, the eternal state of those, who of all others in the world ought to be most dear to you. Let me therefore, by the obligations of religion, by the ties of natural affection, by our expectations of the last account, urge it upon myself and you, to be faithful herein. What a dreadful scene will that great day open, if a charge of unfaithfulness in this respect, should



should then be brought against us! And our children have cause to upbraid us with their eternal ruin!

BUT think of the honour of having trained immortal souls, for the approbation of their judge, and to the joys of eternity! What glory will it be to us in that solemn day, to have been faithful and successful, in forming minds committed to our trust, for the resemblance, love, and everlasting enjoyment of God! What an addition will it be to the triumph and joy of that day, to have ours, by our means, share them with us? And when called upon by the judge, to be able to stand forth, and say with an humble confidence, Lord, here are we, and the souls whom thou hast given us!

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## DISCOURSE II.

GENESIS xviii. 19.

*For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*

**T**HE religious government of a family, is the subject about which we are treating. In discoursing upon which, it has been proposed to show, wherein the duty itself consists.

AND to offer some arguments and motives to recommend and inforce it.

As the subject is in every view of great importance, I shall take the liberty, to pursue it a little further, with an honest freedom

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dom and plainness. And I hope for your attention to it with seriousness and candour.

IT was observed, That one part of every head of a family is, to keep up the stated and regular worship of God in his house.

THE reasonableness of this in general, and particularly of doing it morning and evening: its happy tendency, if prudently and decently performed: the pleasure and utility of it: and the mischief of neglecting it, have been represented to you. And though, as has been observed, there should be no express injunction of this duty in the word of God, yet it is sufficiently implied in those directions, to pray every where: to continue instant in prayer: to pray always: in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known to God, and such like \*. *St. Peter* exhorting christian husbands and wives, to behave to each other as being heirs together of the grace of life, recommends it by this motive, *that their prayers be not hindered* †: that

\* 1 Tim. ii. 8.  
Phillip. iv. 6.

1 Theff. v. 17. Rom. xii. 12.  
† 1 Peter iii. 7.

that is, that they be not unfitted for the joint discharge of this duty: nor its success and efficacy prevented. A christian family is described as *the church*, or a religious society, *in an house* \*. And what, I pray you, is a Church, without the worship of God? Surely these things, without an express command, are sufficient to recommend a duty, the reasonableness, pleasure, honour and advantage of which is so evident. And to make the want of this a plea for neglecting it, betrays a mind and heart too little affected with religious obligations and interests.

THOUGH I have hitherto only mentioned family prayer, yet I would not be thought to discourage the reading of the word of God. Very far from this, is my design. This I would also recommend, as oft as it can be properly and prudently done. It is upon many accounts extremely useful. And is what no one, who has a just value for this sacred treasure, or a becoming concern for the salvation of his family, will entirely

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\* Rom. xvi. 5. Col. iv. 15. Philemon 2.

ly omit: though he should not consider it so essential to his constant family worship, as prayer to God. But then I would add, that there are some parts of the sacred book more calculated to family instruction and worship than others: the selecting of which must be left to the prudence and care of the religious head of a family.

BUT notwithstanding all that has been said of the obligation, propriety, and happy tendency, of the stated regular worship of God in a family, yet it must be acknowledged, and is to be lamented, that this great and important part of the religious government of a family, is too much neglected. Neglected, not only by those who have no concern about religion; but also, I fear, by some who profess a regard to it; and I hope are in good earnest about it; and desirous that their children and household after them, should keep the way of the Lord.

As to the former of these, I but little expect to make any great or good impression



sion upon them, by any thing that hath been, or may be yet further offered. Those that think religion of so small consequence to themselves, or to their families, that the time spent about it is thrown away: those who imagine, that all they have to do for their children, is to take care of their bodies, to get them fortunes, or to teach them how to make their way, or to rise in the world; or that all their concern with their servants and domestics, is to see that they mind their business: those who object to whatever breaks in upon their evening amusements and sensual entertainments, and think the time spent in these will turn to better account than religion and salvation: those with whom the providence and favour of almighty God, and the care of immortal souls, are things out of the question; and who think that they have nothing to do with his blessing now, or his acceptance at last: such as these, (and God knows too many such there are) it may be in vain to speak to, or write for. They, I suppose, will despise and reject what I am saying, as over-much preciseness, and needless formality.

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BUT the others whom I mentioned : those who have a regard to religion ; a sense of providence ; who are convinced of the happy tendency of true piety, of the necessity, as well as value, of the divine blessing and favour ; and who are indeed desirous that their children and household after them should keep the way of the Lord : these I would, in the spirit of christian friendship and love, beg seriously to consider, upon what footing the practice which I am now recommending stands : and what they can say, to justify to God, or to themselves, their neglect of it. Recapitulate with me, my brethren, what has been already offered. And give me your serious attention, while I endeavour to obviate any difficulties which may lie in the way to your discharge of this duty.

FIRST then. Ask yourselves; ask your consciences before God. Is not this a reasonable service? Is it not useful? Is not its tendency apparently beneficial? Is not the disuse of it as evidently hurtful to the interests of piety and virtue? Whether you con-  
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sider the important interests which religion proposes : or your dependance upon the providence of God for domestic, as well as for personal safety and happiness : or your obligations to the same divine providence for every relative and social comfort and enjoyment. Or if you change the view ; and consider the direct and manifest tendency of religious principles and motives, to secure and promote mutual peace, love, and harmony, fidelity, and diligence, and every good disposition and affection, which contributes to render a family agreeable and happy. Or if you consider a family, as forming a distinct society within itself, under the care of the heads thereof ; and to be modelled and managed by their pious and prudent authority and example. Or if, once more, you extend the view, and consider families, as seminaries for the church, and for the world, and for heaven too. In which soever of these views you consider the matter, the reasonableness and importance of this duty is very obvious. And surely then, when all these considerations



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unite, it will be sufficient to convince your judgment, and to determine your practice.

UNDER these sentiments, let then each one of us, my brethren, make a serious and faithful appeal to his own conscience. Is not my being placed by providence at the head of a family, an important trust committed to me? Do not fidelity, and love, and all the sacred engagements of religion, justice, and charity, oblige me to take the best care, and to promote to my utmost, the happiness of those who are intrusted to me? Is not the promoting religion, whose interests are in every view the most momentous, an essential part of this my care and duty? And is not the regular serious worship of God in my house, manifestly adapted to promote it? Is not piety and the fear of God, the best security against, the most powerful curb to those unruly passions and irregular practices, which break or disturb family peace and comfort? Is it not the strongest motive to those virtues and duties, which promote the  
one

one common interest, and advance the harmony and happiness of a house? Is it not then my interest, as well as my duty, to use all proper means to establish its influence and power in my family? Is not my example likely to have a very considerable effect upon those, whose eyes are directed towards me, and who have their dependance upon me? And shall I not then do honour to God before my house, by calling upon them to join with me in paying our daily homage to him? Is it upon the blessing of the Almighty, and his all surrounding providence, that I and mine are dependent, and to this that we are indebted, for every domestic and relative, as well as personal blessing? For protection and guidance by night and by day? And amidst the various turns and changes of life? Is it not then reasonable to offer before, and with my family, our stated joint acknowledgements to him? And to recommend ourselves and our common concerns to his superintendence? Or is there any common service, in which a family can join, which can afford equal satisfaction and pleasure, as thus  
to

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to unite in supplication and thanksgiving to the great Lord and father of all? To sum up all, do not duty, gratitude, interest here powerfully combine, to enforce and recommend a practice, which is in itself a reasonable acknowledgment due to the great God; and which has an apparent tendency to promote the most valuable and desirable ends? Forgive me, my christian brethren, that I use this plainness of speech: and endeavour to place this subject in different points of view. It is because I am convinced of the importance and propriety of what I am recommending: and because I am persuaded, that the honour of God, the interests of religion, and the comfort and happiness of christian families, and the everlasting happiness of individuals, very much depend upon it.

LET these things be seriously and impartially considered. And then let us proceed

SECONDLY. To enquire into and obviate the difficulties and objections, which  
lie



lie in the way to our immediate engagement in the practice of this duty.

AND surely, after what has been said, you cannot urge that it is needless and superfluous : since it appears to be in itself, so reasonable and fit ; so important ; so agreeable : and in its genuine tendency, so highly beneficial and useful.

Is it then, that it is burthensome and irksome, that it is so much neglected ? No more can this be fairly objected, than the former. If it be made an objection, it is either for want of a just sense of, and relish for, piety and religion ; or through the imprudence and indiscretion of those who conduct this service. But is it so in itself ? Think seriously, my brethren. Is there any thing grievous, or to be complained of as a burthen, in uniting our humble adorations, our thankful acknowledgments, our affectionate prayers for ourselves and each other, before the great and universal parent, the God of the families that call upon his name ? Is there any thing tedious and irksome,

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some, in recommending by fervent supplication, ourselves, one another, and our closely connected interests to his almighty, all-wise, and gracious protection, guidance, and favour? And in so doing to impress our own minds, and those that belong to us, with a governing sense of his constant inspection; and of our dependence upon him, our duty and obligations to him? Any thing grievous and burthenfome, did I ask? Yea is it not an honour, a privilege? And, if discharged in the manner that it should be, attended with satisfaction and pleasure in the performance: and producing the most desirable effects.

WILL it be objected against this practice, that it is by some made a matter of form or custom? While by others it is enjoined as a mere task? and what so it be done, no matter how?

THIS may be, I am afraid is, too true, in some instances. And far am I from encouraging or pleading for this slavish or formal performance of it. But what then?

If

If it be abused, or too great stress be laid upon the thing done, or it be performed by any at unfit times, doth it from thence follow, that the thing itself is wrong? or answers no good purpose? or may be wholly disused? To argue against a thing, merely from the abuse of it, would, in other cases, be allowed to be very false reasoning. For what good thing in all the world, is not liable to be abused and perverted? Even prayer in general, and the public worship of God, may have degenerated into a form of godliness: and be placed in the room of the substantial virtues of a good life. This is a horrid perversion of them. But shall they for that reason be laid aside? No man surely will say so. Obvious it is, and no less reasonable, that we should here distinguish. And if the practice which we are recommending be so fit, important, and useful as it has been represented, it can be no just excuse, much less a sufficient justification, of our living in the neglect of it, that it has been by some abused and perverted.

HERE



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HERE then let me insert a caution to those, who dare not live in the neglect of family worship. Take care of the manner in which it be performed: that it be done with seriousness, gravity, and decency, becoming the nature of the service. Prudently avoid every thing disgusting, and tedious. Chuse the fittest time for the performance of it: and do not usually postpone it, till you and your family are fitter to sleep than to pray. And never let it be performed barely as a thing to be done, though no matter how. For want of attending to these things, the very design of the duty hath been defeated. And instead of promoting its genuine and truly valuable purposes, the quite contrary effects have been produced: and an indifference, perhaps an aversion to religion, has been contracted.

IT may be further objected, where are those happy effects from the performance of this duty, which you speak of? Amongst some of those, who set up for great strictness in this matter, do you find them the  
better

better for it? Are they not in their general character and conduct alike, and some of them, it may be, worse than others who make no account of it? Deep prejudices are hereby taken up, not only against the duty which I am now recommending, but against religion in general.

GRIEVED I am that there is so much room for this objection : so much colour for this pretence. It must give pain to every one, who hath the interests of piety at heart. Nor can we, my brethren, more convincingly obviate and remove it, than by a holy and christian temper and conduct, in every character and relation of life. Be this then, I earnestly exhort you, our care. For otherwise our shame and guilt is the greater: not only as we convict ourselves of inconsistency before God and our own consciences ; but also as we wound religion, and prejudice others against it, and its services.

BUT after all, there is no reasonable weight in this objection : nor any thing that will justify or excuse us in a neglect of this duty.

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duty. For the question fairly stated is, not what effect it doth actually produce, but what it is evidently calculated to produce. Now this matter I may venture to rest, upon an appeal to every thinking serious mind, whether the regular, serious, and conscientious worship of God in a family, is not calculated, to promote an habitual reverence of him in the heart? to check the force of temptations? to curb the violence of passions? and to engage to all the duties of personal, relative, and social life? Or if, on the contrary, the neglect hereof, is not likely to weaken a sense of God in the heart and life? and gradually to efface the strongest principle and security of duty and virtue? In other words: whether piety and virtue, with all their fair and amiable fruits, are not more likely to flourish in that house, where their seeds and principles are cherished and cultivated by daily prayer, and the worship of God is stately and reverently kept up? than where no such care is taken; and the name of God is scarce ever invoked, except in profaneness, levity, or passion?

WILL



WILL it be urged by any as an exemption from this duty, that they want time for it? And that an attention to the necessary concerns of life, doth not admit of their performing it? Rather let them speak the truth: and say, that they want an excuse for neglecting it; and have but little inclination to engage in it.

DID indeed the practice which I am recommending, require any great length of time; upon none, not the most pressing occasion to be dispensed with, it might be objected to upon this head: especially in some situations of life. But here prudence, with piety, is to guide. And this duty is to be performed, not as an imposed task, but as a willing service. It should be remembered, that there is a great difference between an occasional prudential omission, and a stated disuse of it. In the usual services of every day, it is neither necessary, nor proper that they should be very long: nor are they upon that account only, more acceptable to God, or more conducive to

D

moral

moral and religious purposes. It is not the *time* spent in them, but the *manner* and *views* with which they are performed, that gives them their use and value. And who can fairly say, that they are so much engaged, as not to have a few minutes out of twenty-four hours to spare, for that which is so reasonable, and so evidently conducive to domestic comfort and happiness? Have you not times for meals? Suppose then a few minutes were added to those times, for this service? Do we not find time for recreation? And what if a small portion was redeemed from this, for what would, I am persuaded, yield us full as much pleasure, and turn to quite as good account? And perhaps if this matter were to be traced, it would be found, that not those who have least, but those who have most time, are most deficient herein: and that it is not for want of opportunity, but of disposition. The objection therefore ought to have no weight, which, if there be a willing mind, prudence and discretion can so easily remove.

WILL

WILL any plead an incapacity for carrying on this service, in such a manner as they could wish? Or say, that they are not able to express themselves in prayer before others, with that propriety and fullness, which the nature and importance of the duty requires?

I answer: This can hardly proceed from natural inability: but principally, if not entirely, from disuse; and therefore cannot be admitted as a sufficient excuse. Christians of mean parts, and low abilities, have been able to perform this duty with seriousness and decency. Shame or modesty should not be allowed, to prevail over the dictates of reason and conscience. And indeed, the longer we allow ourselves to neglect this duty upon this account, the more difficult still will it grow. And if we for this reason decline it, what shall our children do, when they come to be heads of families, after being bred up utter strangers to this part of their duty?



BUT after all, be our inability what it will, or from whatever cause it proceed, it may be supplied by those helps, many of which we have at hand. And though forms are, I think, in some respects inconvenient, and not to be preferred, yet I am so far from absolutely condemning them, that I would recommend them to those, who find the need of them; and feel that they can pray with the most devotion in the use of them\*. But I would at the same time advise, to use them as a lame man doth his crutches: with a view and desire, as soon as he can, to walk without them†. An objection therefore, that piety, resolution, and prudence can so easily answer and surmount, ought not to be pleaded as an excuse: much less will be admitted as a justification.

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\* Without any design to depreciate others, I would particularly recommend; *The Family Prayer-book* first published in 1743, and also; *Forms of devotion for the use of families*, 1758.

† *Bishop Wilkins on prayer*, p. 8, 9. &c. 8th edit.

THE too general disuse of this duty, may perhaps be a reason with some, for paying no regard to it.

IF it be so with any to whom I now speak, I must be so free as to tell them, that it is a very poor one: injurious to conscience: and affronting to God. Is the practice of others, I beseech you, a rule to your conscience? Is their neglect of a duty, an excuse for your neglecting it? If they, through carelessness, or a want of conviction, omit it, will their omission justify you for not following the dictates of your judgment and conscience? Do you owe more to the opinion and practice of others, than you do to God, and conscience, and your families? But, you would not be thought precise and singular: or to affect more religion, than the rest of your neighbours. To obey God and conscience ought not to be called affectation or preciseness. And if to do this, and to take care of your families, is to be singular, it is a noble singularity: a distinction, that no man, on

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his own account, need to blush at. Rather let the blush cover their faces, who by their neglect, contribute to this singularity. But will you, my friends, pay more regard to the opinion, to the sneers, of unthinking men, than to the testimony of conscience, and the approbation of God? Will you throw off the profession of religion, because you would not be counted hypocrites? Will you, for fear of being laught at by those who are, in this respect, beneath your notice, neglect what you are convinced is reasonable and important? or subject yourselves to the reproaches of your own hearts? Learn to despise their ill-placed ridicule. And as for that of others, you need not fear it. Let but the genuine effects of family religion be seen in your tempers and lives, and then all men, whose opinion is of any worth, will esteem and respect you for it. Perhaps too your example may have an happy influence upon them: and lead them thus to glorify your heavenly father. You will, however, secure what is worth more, than the judgment of all the world;



world; I mean the smiles and approbation of God and conscience. And what if any should after all say, it is making too much ado, this should be counted a very small matter by us, when we know that we are acting from conscience towards God, and a regard to our families.

ONCE more: Perhaps we find a shame, reluctance, and difficulty, in beginning a practice, which we have for a long while lived in the disuse of: and this weighs more with us, than a general conviction of its reasonableness and utility.

BUT think seriously, my brethren. Should it thus preponderate? Will it excuse or justify us to God, to our own consciences, or to our families, still to neglect what we are now persuaded is right and fit, because we have through inattention, or from some other cause, hitherto neglected it? What! Is perseverance in an error or omission, after we are convinced of it, better than retracting and amending it! We cannot surely think

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so. The just and religious inference is, that now we will yield to conviction : make every little scruple and difficulty give way to it : and delay no longer. It is more truly great, honourable, and praise-worthy, as well as unspeakably more to our satisfaction and comfort, to acknowledge a mistake, than to persist in it. Though there may be some difficulty in it, something humbling, yet this is only at the beginning. And would we but use authority with ourselves, and resolutely break through our reluctance, and engage regularly in the performance of this duty, we should, I am persuaded, feel that satisfaction in our own breasts, as would abundantly reward us : and give such an instance to our families of our regard to God, and of our love to them, as would procure us their honour and esteem ; and might have a very happy influence upon their temper and behaviour.

HOWEVER, as too many find a difficulty to their engaging in family religion, from their having too long already neglected it, I  
would

would from hence take occasion, earnestly to exhort those to whom it is applicable, that at their first entrance into family connections, they would begin with setting up the stated worship of God: and make this a part of their original plan, for the government of their house. And if, for want of it in those families where they have been educated, or from modesty, or from any other cause, they feel, or think they feel, an insufficiency for it, let them be advised thankfully to use the helps they have at hand: till, by God's grace, and their own piety, seriousness, and care, they may be able, more agreeably and pertinently, to accommodate their family devotions, to the incidental circumstances and occasions which may arise; and which the best composed forms cannot provide for. But by no means, let this duty be neglected. And whether we pray by forms, or without them, let it be done with seriousness, reverence, and decency. Let prudence settle the most convenient time: and the service be lengthened or contracted, as occasions require, or necessary



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cessary affairs will admit. Let it be made as agreeable and pleasant as possible. For so should every thing in religion be : especially to young persons and children : who should never be drove to duty : nor forced to prayers, when nature calls them to rest : but be taught to account joining therein, as their honour and privilege ; and their being kept from it, when otherwise they might attend, as a punishment, or mark of disgrace for some crime committed.

OH could I see the revival of this, it is said, too much neglected and antiquated, but important, part of family government ! And thus placed upon a right footing ! Then would families be, what they ought to be, and what the God of nature and providence designed they should be, nurseries for the church, and for heaven. Where tender plants would be formed, for the garden of God below : and for his paradise above. Then might we hope to see piety and virtue, yet again revive : and from those lesser, spreading their agreeable and beneficial effects

fects through larger communities: and adorning and blessing the church and the world.

HAPPY the family, where religion begins, conducts, and finishes, the work, the labour, the enjoyments of every day! And every breast is under its genuine generous influences! Cheerful they may go through the toils, difficulties, and hazards of the day; for Providence guides them! Safely and peaceably they may meet the darkness and unseen dangers of the night; for the Almighty protects them! Pleasantly they may enjoy the comforts of life; for God accepts them! Calmly they may acquiesce in afflictions and disappointments; for infinite wisdom and love prescribe these to them! Blessed are they in their going out, and in their coming in: in their lying down, and rising up: in their basket and store! Yea blessed in their smallest pittance, as well as in the greatest abundance: in their sorrows and losses, as well as enjoyments and gains! Blessed indeed they are!

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are ! For the Lord of heaven and of earth  
blesseth them !

AND wouldst thou, my friend, wish to be thus blessed in thyself, as well as to be a blessing to all around thee ? Wouldst thou form others also, to be thus blessings, and thus blessed ? Wouldst thou convey this honour and privilege, to thy children's children, as well as to themselves ? Carefully cultivate religion in thyself and them : and neglect not that, which we have been recommending ; and which is so promising and efficacious a means, in order hereto. Endeavour above all things, to secure the presence of almighty God with thyself, and them. And then thou and thine shall be certainly blessed.

BUT can we expect the blessing of God upon our families, if we do not seek or acknowledge him in them ? Or can we expect that they should pay any regard to religion, if we neglect that, which hath so direct a tendency to promote it ? When a  
family



family is suffered to go on from day to day, without any joint acknowledgements of God, how great is the danger of their contracting an insensibility of him? A disregard to his providence? A neglect of his laws? Careless and indifferent about, either pleasing, or offending him? And if the dependent branches of a family, children especially, see no instance or example of an avowed regard to, and acknowledgement of God and Providence, how natural, how easy, is it for them, to sink into an habitual practical disregard to him, in their tempers, words, and actions? The best way to teach our children to pray, and to engage them to it, is to pray with them. Hereby they are gradually and imperceptibly formed for the performance of this duty: as well as, by our example, are led on to the practice of it. And hereby they contract such habits, as will enable them, with ease and pleasure, to perform this important service, when time and Providence shall give them families of their own. And thus shall we do our part, to transmit religion in our houses, from generation to generation.

THUS

THUS have I discharged my duty : faithfully represented to, and urged upon you this part of family order and government : and endeavoured to obviate and remove the difficulties and objections, that may have hindered the performance of it.

WHAT now remains is, that you seriously lay these things to heart. And if you are convinced of the reasonableness, importance, and advantage of this duty, that you forthwith engage in it. And admit nothing as an excuse, which will not justify you to God, and your own consciences. Nor be deterred from it, by any real or imagined difficulties or discouragements, which piety, prudence, and resolution can obviate or remove.

FOR the present, I shall only subjoin my hearty prayer, that God will please to bless, what has been sincerely intended for his glory, and your good. That he will increase the number of pious and praying families. That he will plentifully shower down, the blessings of his providence and grace upon all  
such.

fuch. That you, my brethren, may be blessed with his guidance and presence in all your concerns. That your pious endeavours may be rewarded, in faithful and diligent servants : in dutiful and religious children ; your pleasure and delight now ; and your crown of rejoicing in the great day. That upon you and your houses, the God of heaven may look down : and bear you, each one of you, this honourable testimony, I know him that he will command his children, and his household ; and that after his example, and by his pious prudent care, they shall keep the way of the Lord. Him therefore, in blessing will I bless. And in him shall his seed be blessed. They also shall be the care of my providence. They shall be the comfort and joy of his advancing years. When he shall be removed from them, I will be their God. And his wife, and faithful, and pious care, shall be rewarded in and with them, at the great day, and to all eternity.

GRANT, most gracious father, this blessing to all these thy servants, for thy mercies sake in Christ Jesus. Amen and Amen.

D I S-







## DISCOURSE III.

GENESIS xviii. 19.

*For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*

**I**T has been proposed in discoursing upon these words, to consider the religious government of a family: wherein it consists: and the arguments and motives to inforce it.

MANY things have been offered under the first of these heads. And that important branch of this duty, which consists of the regular, daily worship of God in a family, has been particularly considered. And we have attempted (with what success you know best) to obviate and remove the difficulties

ficulties and objections, which may have hindered any of us from the performance of this duty. I now proceed

FIFTHLY, It should be the care of every wife and religious head of a family, of every one who is desirous that his children and household after him should keep the way of the Lord, that the Lord's-day be not profaned: that the house and worship of God be attended by those under his care: and that they have no unnecessary hindrance or avocation from, the public or private duties of that holy day.

IN this it must be acknowledged and lamented, there is too great neglect. And from (shall I say) too high and rigorous notions of the christian sabbath, some have relaxed a great deal too far: and have run into the opposite, and much worse, extream. With too many it is looked upon quite as a day of leisure and relaxation: without any regard to the moral and religious design of it. Perhaps, not so much as the public services of the day are attended. Or  
if



if they are, the rest of the time is so spent, as utterly to prevent any good effects from them : yea too oft, so as to efface all religious sentiments and impressions : and to corrupt the mind. What I am saying, is not mere declamation. It is too obvious a truth to be denied : too sad a one, not to give real concern. Who doth not see and own, that the great want of principle, the great degeneracy of manners which we complain of, is owing in some measure to this ? Much might be done by heads of families, to prevent or cure this growing evil. Much therefore is, in this respect incumbent upon them.

If they would take care by their example to sanctify the Lord's-day : if they would exercise a prudent circumspection over their families : if they would promote and encourage an attendance upon public worship : if they would restrain those liberties which are oft taken, and which have an apparent bad tendency : if they would employ some part of the evening of that day in religious exercises with their families : if they would allow them time for,

and encourage them in, still more retired thought and reflection : if they would take such opportunities for religious converse with their children : This I think would have, I am sure it promises, a very happy effect. Then the religious and moral purposes of that day might be promoted. It might be an happy means of preserving or reviving the fear of God in the heart, and piety and virtue in the temper and life.

SURELY these are important ends. All who have any sense of religion and a future state, will acknowledge that they are. All who have any regard to the honour of God, to the interests of christianity, who have any just and religious love to their families, will be glad to promote these ends. The fitness and propriety of this method in order hereto, is too obvious to need a proof. In all this, there is nothing burthen-some or unreasonable. Yea I am persuaded, that such an observation of the Lord's-day, would not only be productive of the best effects, but would in itself yield the truest and most rational satisfaction and pleasure. This therefore I would very earnestly re-  
com-

commend to those, who have any esteem for religion; and are desirous that their children and household after them, should keep the way of the Lord.

THERE is one thing more, which I ought not slightly to pass over: yea which I would with all the seriousness and earnestness that I can, recommend and enforce. And that is;

SIXTHLY. That above all things, those who are heads of families be careful, to set a good example to their children and servants.

THIS is indeed of the last importance: of such consequence, that all the rest, in some measure, depend upon it. Nor can we expect any great success, from our instructions, our restraints, our prayers, or from any thing else which we can do to promote religion in our families, unless they come thus recommended and enforced. Any great success, did I say? I might have said, that without this, we undo all: and most effectually defeat all our other attempts to advance religion and virtue.



EXAMPLE has, of all things, the greatest influence : especially with inferiors and dependents : most of all with our children. There is a secret charm attends it. And it works, though gradually and imperceptibly, yet more powerfully and successfully, than perhaps we are aware of. What we are and do will be more observed and regarded by our children and servants, than what we say. And to profess one thing, and to be another, is likely to make very unhappy impressions upon their minds : and to implant, and fix in them the deepest prejudices against religion. With what face can we recommend piety and virtue to our families, if we disregard them ourselves ? Or with what reason can we expect, that our prayers and endeavours, should have any effect upon them, if they have none upon ourselves ? Or with what authority or influence, can we reprove and restrain them, if we allow ourselves in the same, or in as unbecoming liberties ; or if we indulge ourselves, if not in the same vices and passions, yet in others equally, or perhaps more base and enormous ? Oh with what an ill grace do we pray to God in our families, and show no regard

regard to him in our lives? What a shocking impropriety, to appear scrupulous about the forms of religion, careless about the substance of it? With what conscience, or how without a reproachful blush, can we blame or punish a fault in a child or a servant, when chargeable with the same, or with greater, ourselves? Can they think us in earnest? Will they not judge, that we act from pride or passion, and not out of any real regard to religion, or love to them? Will they not in their after reflections, (and if they should in their words, how could we answer them?) retort upon us, thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that prayest to God, dost thou throw off all fear of him? Thou that sayest, that I should not lie, or steal, or take God's name in vain, dost thou make no scruple of doing the same? or of being proud, peevish, passionate, revengeful, covetous, intemperate, or the like? What then! Are these things crimes in me, and not in thyself? Or dost thou expect me to amend them, and takest no care to do it thyself? Or canst thou blame and pu-

nish me, for being only like thyself? Or will thy resentment against me for these things, palliate or atone for them in thyself? Tell me now, which am I to regard most, or think thee most in earnest about, what thou sayest, or what thou doest? These reflections are very just, in the case which I am now supposing. And they are very keen and poignant. What parent or master could stand such an expostulation, from a child, or a servant? He might take upon him to resent it, as rude. But he could not answer it, as unjust. If it belongs to any of us, let us hear the reproaches of conscience: and take care to give no further just occasion for it. For indeed, it is not to be easily conceived, not only how much good is hindered, but also how much harm is done hereby.

GIVE me leave to represent this matter to you, in the words of that great and good man, archbishop *Tillotson*. “ The evil example of parents, is both a temptation and  
“ encouragement to children to sin : because  
“ it is a kind of authority for what they do ;  
“ and



“ and looks like a justification of their wick-  
“ edness. With what reason canst thou ex-  
“ pect that thy children should follow thy  
“ good instructions, when thou thyself givest  
“ them an ill example ? Thou dost but, as it  
“ were, beckon to them with thy head, and  
“ show them the way to heaven by thy  
“ good counsel : but thou takest them by  
“ the hand, and leadeest them in the way  
“ to hell, by thy contrary example. When-  
“ ever you swear, or tell a lie, or are pas-  
“ sionate and furious, or come drunk into  
“ your family,” (and the like may be said  
in a degree of any other criminal indulgence,  
for I hope I speak to none who run these  
sad lengths) “ you weaken the authority of  
“ your commands ; and lose all reverence  
“ and obedience to them, by contradicting  
“ your own precepts \*.”

BUT now on the other hand. A good  
example has not only in itself a tendency,  
to form the tempers and manners of our fa-  
milies, our children especially, to a simi-  
larity ; but it also places religion in a very  
engaging

\* Tillotson's serm. vol. i. p. 497, 10th edit. fol.

engaging light ; and naturally begets an esteem, love, and choice of it, in those who thus behold it. And further still, it gives a grace, and a force, a peculiar energy, to every wise and prudent method for promoting religion in our families. Where the heads of a family, in the engaging language of the Apostle, walk together “ as heirs of “ the grace of life,” form their own lives upon the gospel plan, and adorn their conversation with the graces of christianity, “ their prayers are not hindered :” nothing is done to prevent their efficacy : every thing is done that promises their success \*. Where the root is sound and vigorous, the branches, which derive their nourishment from thence, are likely to be so too. But where that is unsound or decayed, these will be languid and sickly : and their fruit, if any, will be mean or bad. Where religion leads, it is likely to be followed : and where it rules and guides the head and heart of a family, it will more probably diffuse itself through every part and member. When a sense of God, and a regard to the gospel, meliorates the  
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\* 1 Peter iii. 7.

the temper, calms the passions, regulates the speech, softens the heart; when it promotes meekness, gentleness, and compassion; when it engages to integrity, and consistency in the general conduct, and exerts and produces all its amiable and engaging effects, how venerable and lovely doth it appear? How attractive is it felt? All that see it, and feel the benign influences of it, admire and esteem it: and from esteem and admiration, are insensibly, and almost irresistibly led on to chuse and imitate it.

HAPPY the family, where such are the heads of it! Their prayers not only come up before God with acceptance, but reach the hearts of those who join in them, with a double force. Their example spreads its sweet and enlivening influences: and engages all to wish and endeavour to be like them. Their children suck in nourishment and growth from it, to their piety and virtue: and form their habits from this engaging model. Their servants also are led to love and practice religion, when they see it thus amiably and beneficially displayed.

With



With what peculiar force and advantage, do all their instructions, prayers, and cautions come, when their own lives testify to the sincerity of them, and explain and urge them? With what greater chearfulness and readiness are their restraints submitted to, when they comply with them themselves; and they appear to flow from conscience and love? And what peculiar advantage do those enjoy for piety, what agreeable engagement and incentives for the cultivation and practice of it, who have always exhibited before them living specimens of its reality, worth, and excellency, in those whom they are bound to serve and honour; whom they are inclined to imitate and resemble.

SINCE then the force of example, either on the one side or the other, is so great and prevalent, let us take special care of ours. Let us manage our tempers, guard our words, and regulate our whole deportment in our houses, with circumspection and care: as those who remember, that our servants, but especially our children, are very observant of us; take their notions of religion,  
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from what they see in us ; and very much form themselves, upon the pattern which we set them. If we would have them good, let us be good ourselves. If we would have them serve the Lord, we must resolve to serve him ourselves. If we would command them, with authority and success, to keep the way of the Lord, it must be after us ; after our example and pattern. If we would have our children go to heaven, let us show them the way thither, by walking in it ourselves. The resolution of *David* as the head of a family, becomes all those who sustain that character ; and with his words I will close this head, “ I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way : when wilt thou come unto me ? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. A froward heart shall depart from me : I will not know a wicked person. He that worketh deceit, shall not dwell within my house : he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight \*.”

THUS

\* Psalm ci. 2, 3, 4, 7.

THUS have I laid before you, with freedom and integrity, the several branches of this great duty. And showed you, what is incumbent upon us, as we would have our children and household after us, keep the way of the Lord. I am not conscious of having omitted any thing, that I think material : of having inserted any thing, that appears needless : or of having laid greater stress upon any thing, than I apprehend it deserves. God is my witness, that my governing aim is to serve you and yours. If any thing that has been offered, should call to remembrance any past neglects, let us endeavour to amend them. And each one of us look at home : and enquire how our houses have been with God.

I now proceed : and beg your further serious attention while,

II. I lay before you the arguments and motives to inforce this duty.

AND when you consider these, you will not wonder at, nor censure the plainness and seri-



seriousness, with which I have endeavoured to treat this subject. For indeed it appears to me, to be a matter of the utmost consequence. And so, I trust, it will appear to you, when you attend to the following things: which, as under the eye of God, I would represent to you: and by the help of his grace, impress upon my own and your consciences.

THE happy effects of religion to families is very evident. Such a wife and prudent care promises the best success for the forming our children, for piety, comfort and usefulness here: and for everlasting happiness hereafter. The honour of God, and the interests of our Lord and master in the world, depend a great deal upon the religious government of families. It is a duty that will yield us the truest pleasure in the performance; and the most solid comfort upon a review. And, lastly, it will be for our honour in the great day, when we come to give an account of this great and important trust committed to us.

SOME

SOME of these have been unavoidably hinted at, when treating on a particular branch of this duty. But I would now something enlarge upon them: and apply them to the general subject. They are very serious and weighty considerations. Each of them singly, carries force in it. Who then that thinks or feels at all, can withstand their united influence? They are too obvious not to be seen, too important not to be felt, by every one who will give himself leave to attend. I say,

FIRST. The religious government of a family, promises the happy effects with respect to the family itself.

FOR it must be acknowledged, that nothing is so effectual a check upon the passions; nothing so powerful a guard against temptations: nothing so strong an incitement to the duties of every relation; nothing so good a security against fraud, treachery, lying, extravagance, intemperance, and other banes of family peace, prosperity, and happiness; nothing so permanent  
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and substantial a motive to mutual love, fidelity, truth, sobriety, diligence, and such like : nothing, I say, so likely to produce these effects, so evidently conducive to domestic order and comfort, as a principle of piety, deeply implanted in the heart and soul ; and kept strong and vigorous there. The fear of God, and the sense of a future state, will determine to a right conduct, though every other consideration should fail ; and every circumstance should concur to tempt to a neglect of it. Religion lays hold of conscience : awakens this in the breast ; and fixes it on the side of duty and virtue, though every other tie should be taken off ; and the temptation to neglect it, should be ever so urgent or favourable. Every wise man therefore, were there no higher inducement, would in point of prudence and interest, be careful about the religious government of his family.

AND besides this, its being a natural and necessary means, to engage the blessing of Almighty God, is a further recommendation of it. Need I say any thing to convince you

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of the importance of this to our safety, comfort, and happiness? Is it not in every view desirable? for protection, guidance, safety, and success? Doth not a sense of it heighten our enjoyments? Give firmness to the mind amidst the instability and fluctuation of human affairs? Administer the best cordials under every affliction and disappointment? But can we reasonably expect the divine presence and care, unless we acknowledge God in our families? promote his honour there? and lead all about us to fear and serve him? And will not the prevalence of religion in a house, by the pious and prudent care and government of those who are the heads of it, render that family a delightful association of hearts and interests? formed upon the wisest plan? governed by the best laws? united by the firmest bonds? influenced by the strongest motives? and insured of the presence, protection, and blessing of God, in all their affairs? Who then can doubt of religion being conducive to the happiness of families? Or hesitate a moment, whether it is not as much the interest, as it is the duty of every

every head of a family, by proper care and government, to cultivate and promote it?

SECONDLY, By the religious care and government of our families, we are most likely to form our children, and others committed to our care, for piety, usefulness, and comfort here; and for everlasting happiness hereafter.

THIS is certainly a very important consideration. And should engage us to a conscientious discharge of this duty, from love to those who are not only members of our family, but parts of ourselves. Can we but wish to see these of importance in future life? valuable members of society? comfortable in themselves? useful to those about them? beloved of God? respected of men? And, which is more still, can we but desire, to secure and promote, as far as in us lies, their happiness to all eternity? Let us then endeavour to instill into their minds principles of piety and virtue: to cultivate with our best and earliest care, a sense of God and religion. Thus we lay a founda-

tion for their being truly worthy and excellent: for securing their most invaluable character and interests; and for leading them on to glory and immortality. Is not this an end worthy our most careful attention? Or can we hope that it should be obtained, but in the use of means so evidently adapted hereto?

GREAT and important, my brethren, is the trust committed to us! Great and illustrious our honour, if we faithfully discharge it! Upon us, in some measure, depends the future well or ill being of rational, immortal souls, put under our tuition and care: their future well or ill being, in time, and to eternity. We are under God, their guardians, their trustees for both worlds. Is it of no moment to us how they form? or what becomes of them? Do not we think it our duty to provide food and clothing for them? to take care of their health, and of their temporary interests? And is religion then, and are their souls of so little consequence, as that here we can think ourselves at liberty, and leave them to chance and  
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hazard? Or do we think this will come of course? Or these be provided for, without our care and cultivation? Oh fatal mistake! oh of all others, most cruel neglect! If we take no care with whom they are connected: if we do nothing to curb and restrain their headstrong passions: if we from day to day, live in the neglect of family prayer: if nothing be done to instruct and furnish them with religious principles: if the neglect and profanation of the Lord's-day be allowed and encouraged: if they see nothing in our examples to engage them to piety and virtue: how do we expect that they should carry any religion into the world with them? Can we then wonder, if they prove profligate and vicious? Can we justly complain of their undutifulness to us, if we have never taught them their higher duty to God? or of their making us miserable, when we have so shamefully neglected their happiness? These reflections are not more plain, than they are serious and important. And if they are attended to as they deserve to be, must, I should think, have force enough, to engage us to this duty.

BUT the matter may be considered in a more extensive view. For

THIRDLY. The honour of God, and the interests of religion in the world, and consequently the public safety and happiness, are greatly concerned in the faithful and diligent discharge of this duty.

WE complain, and not without cause, of the degeneracy of the times : of the want of religious principle : and of the too great depravity of manners. Is it any wonder that it should be so, while children and servants, as to religion and virtue, are so sadly neglected : and parents and heads of families are so deficient in their duty ? While this is so, I despair of seeing any alteration for the better. For here children receive their first impressions : which are likely to be the most deep and permanent. And if here all care of them is laid aside, the more public and general means for promoting religion, will in all probability be ineffectual : and the impressions, if any should be made, soon wear off. Till therefore heads  
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of families are convinced of their neglect, and make conscience of their duty, it is in vain that they complain, or wish to see any change for the better, in the state of religion amongst us. To what purpose are our complaints, if we will do nothing to remove the cause of them? but rather, by our neglect, contribute to strengthen it, and to confirm and spread the growing evil? When *Joshua* was exhorting the people of *Israel*, to unite themselves in the service of *Jehovah*, and lamenting the great danger of a defection from him; in order to inforce his exhortation, and to prevent, as far as he could, the evil which he dreaded, he declares his fixed resolution to take care of his own family: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord \*". And if heads of families would do their parts in their respective houses, we might please ourselves with the hope of seeing the honour of God retrieved; the kingdom of the Redeemer promoted; religion and virtue again revive and flourish; and the public character and happiness secured and advanced. Would every one take care

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\* Josh. xxiv. 15.



of his own little society, and maintain religious order and government there, the great public community, which is formed out of these, would be more regular, virtuous, and happy. Profaneness, infidelity, and vice, would lose ground. The friends and patrons of piety and virtue, would increase in numbers: and unite, with more vigour and efficacy, their efforts to stop the growing torrent of impiety and wickedness; and to revive and promote the languishing interests of religion and the gospel. Religion, from families, would be carried into public life: and there diffuse its happy effects. For families are seminaries for the world: where persons are formed and trained to be useful or worthless, to be blessings, or curses to mankind. Here then, my friends, let us begin. And, as we would not be accessory to public guilt; as we wish the prosperity of our country; as we would retrieve its honour and virtue; and secure to it the guardian care and blessing of Almighty God, let each one of us in his own province, his family, endeavour to restrain vice, to cultivate religion and virtue, and to promote  
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the principles, spirit, and practice of genuine christianity. So shall we do our best to secure those invaluable ends. And our families, as they branch out, and form the like connections, will we may hope follow our examples ; and pursue the same plan. Thus shall we be friends, not only to the present, but to succeeding generations. And may indulge the pleasing thought, that our childrens children may be led to honour God ; and to call us blessed.

FOURTHLY, The faithful performance of this duty, will yield us the truest pleasure and satisfaction : and our care and fidelity herein give us the most solid comfort, when we come calmly to look back upon a past life.

IF by our wise and religious management, those that are committed to our trust, should be formed for importance, usefulness, and esteem in future life, we shall bear a delightful part therein : and behold it with an heart approving pleasure. We shall out-live  
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ourselves in them: and honour and joy crown our declining years. And when death calls us hence, we shall close our eyes upon them with comfort: and leave them, with a pleasing confidence in the hands of a gracious God; with the chearing hope of meeting them again with joy.

TRUE it is, that the best and most faithful endeavours are not always successful. But even here in this case, our fidelity will not be without its reward.

UNDER this, perhaps the most painful sorrow that the human heart knows, we shall have the support of having done our part to prevent their ruin. And the disappointment will sit lighter upon our spirits, when we can consider it, merely as our affliction; not as our crime.

BUT there is one consideration more to engage us to this duty; if possible, still more awful and awakening: and which indeed gives additional force to all the rest. This is

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FIFTHLY. That our care or neglect herein, will very differently affect us in that great and solemn day, when we come to give an account of this and every other trust committed to us.

SUCH an account we shall certainly be called to, if there is any dependence upon conscience : or any truth in the word of God. And a trust of a very weighty nature this is : which providence has devolved upon us : and which we have taken upon ourselves. Consider seriously, my brethren; how shall we answer in that day, for treachery, or neglect in the execution of it? What accumulated guilt, what dreadful accession of misery, will the loss of those committed to our care, if lost through our cruel neglect, occasion to us? Can we bear to think of those, with whom we are intimately connected by the ties of nature and of religion, standing up then ; and confronting and upbraiding us, as the faulty cause of their eternal destruction? Will it not, think you, pierce us to the very heart, to see their distress?

distress? to hear their cries? while our own consciences shall witness against us, as accessory thereto? Will it, can you imagine, acquit us before the judge, that we took great care of their bodies, but none of their souls? That we were so fond and indulgent, as to pamper and gratify their passions and inclinations? so cruel, as intirely to neglect their better part? That we were very careful about their interests in time? totally careless about those of eternity? That, as heads of families, we were attentive about honour and service to ourselves? but took no thought about the honour of God, or to teach them their duty to him? Will this, if it be the best account which we can give, acquit us in that tremendous day? Acquit us, did I ask? Yea will it not dreadfully condemn us? and expose us to the charge and punishment of the most cruel unfaithfulness?

THESE are very pungent reflections. But they have their use, to excite our care and caution: Perhaps the words of that excellent

lent preacher whom I have already quoted, may set this thought in a more striking light.

“ What will parents be able to say to God  
“ at the day of judgment for all their neglects  
“ of their children ? How will it make your  
“ ears tingle, when God shall arise terribly  
“ in judgment, and say to you, Behold ! the  
“ children which I have given you. They  
“ were ignorant, and you instructed them  
“ not. They made themselves vile ; and  
“ you restrained them not. Why did you  
“ not teach them at home ? and bring them  
“ to church ? and train them up to the  
“ exercise of piety and devotion ? But you  
“ did not only neglect to give them good in-  
“ struction, but you gave them bad exam-  
“ ple. And lo they have followed you to  
“ hell, to be an addition to your torment  
“ there.” After more of this heavy charge  
in the name of the judge, he thus proceeds.

“ Will it not cut you to the heart, and  
“ pierce your very souls, to have your chil-  
“ dren challenge you in that day ? and say  
“ to you one by one, Had you been as care-  
“ ful to teach me the good knowledge of  
“ the Lord, as I was capable of learning it :  
“ had



“ had you been but as forward to instruct  
 “ me in my duty, as I was ready to have  
 “ hearkened to it, it had not been with me,  
 “ as it is this day. I had not now stood trem-  
 “ bling here, in a fearful expectation of the  
 “ eternal doom, which is just ready to be  
 “ passed upon me. Cursed be the man that  
 “ begat me ; and the paps that gave me  
 “ suck. ’Tis to you, that I must in a great  
 “ measure owe my everlasting undoing.  
 “ Would it not strike any of us with horror,  
 “ to be thus challenged, and reproached by  
 “ our children, in that great and terrible day  
 “ of the Lord \* ?”

BUT I would present you with a more  
 encouraging and delightful scene : even the  
 glory and reward of that man, who is faith-  
 ful to this great and interesting trust. If  
 his pious care and endeavours should be (as  
 with grief I speak it, they too oft are) inef-  
 fectual, yet he shall receive the testimony  
 of his conscience, the applause of his judge,  
 and the recompence of his fidelity. He shall  
 be clear from their guilt and condemnation :

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\* Tillotson’s serm. vol. i. p. 513.

• it shall all fall upon themselves. But if we are thus faithful, we may indulge the pleasing hope of being successful. And then will the glory of that day be compleat. Oh what an addition of honour and joy will it be to us then, to have been happily instrumental in forming those committed to our trust, for the everlasting likeness, love, and enjoyment of God? To have laid a foundation for their eternal glory and bliss? With what delight shall we receive their grateful acknowledgments? What an additional lustre, will our crown receive from theirs? With what extasies shall we hear the commendatory applause of the judge, for having added to the triumphs of his cross and kingdom? And what an accession will it be to our everlasting felicity, to have others, those especially without whom we can scarce think ourselves happy, then and for ever happy with us? These, my brethren, are indeed very animating considerations. I cannot represent them to you, with that force and power that they deserve: nor indeed as I feel them. Oh may we all experience their persuasive influence!

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PERMIT me now to sum up all. And most earnestly to exhort, yea most solemnly to conjure myself and you, by the honour which we owe to God ; and our desire to secure his presence and blessing : by the love we bear to our families ; and our concern for their present and eternal welfare : by the duty we owe to our country ; and our wishes to promote its virtue and happiness : by our zeal for the Lord Jesus ; and our regard to those for whom he died : by all our religious, christian, social, and relative engagements : and above all, by our views of the last awful day ; and all the tremendous, or glorious consequences of it to ourselves and ours : by all these serious and awakening motives and arguments, let me most fervently and affectionately charge it upon us all, and lay it home to our consciences, that we command our children and household after us, that they keep the way of the Lord.

F I N I S.





